

VZCZCXRO1325
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAM #8806 3450544
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 110544Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6055
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS AMMAN 008806

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: NGOS CRITICAL OF U.S. POLICY DENOUNCE FORUM FOR
THE FUTURE

REF: AMMAN 8573

11. (U) Summary: Jordanian and international NGOs opposed to the Forum for the Future convened an alternative conference, dubbed "The Forum to Oppose Hegemony," from November 30 to December 1. Ninety civil society organizations from across the Middle Eastern region, and from France and Norway, focused on anti-U.S., anti-Israel, and anti-western themes, and denounced the G-8 for their "hypocrisy." Although smaller than the Forum for the Future's civil society gathering, the alternative forum succeeded in attracting local and regional media attention. End summary.

12. (U) From 30 November to 1 December the "Forum to Oppose Hegemony" convened as a challenge to the Forum for the Future and its parallel civil society conference (reftel). The opposition forum was attended by 90 civil society organizations from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Qatar, Bahrain, Turkey, Greece, France and Norway, and neutral observers commented that it was well organized. The general content of the forum was primarily anti-US, anti-western speeches. The forum organizer was Hani Dahleh, a Jordanian lawyer who is president of the Arab Organization for Human Rights. Dahleh made local news earlier this year by publicly refusing to meet with the Embassy human rights officer. Prominent Jordanian participants included Zaki Bani Irsheid, Secretary General of the Islamic Action Front, the political wing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, and Toujan Faisal, a former member of parliament (1993-1997). By way of comparison, the Forum for the Future's "official" civil society event November 27 and 28 in Amman was attended by roughly 175 regional and international NGOs, represented by about 320 delegates.

13. (SBU) A press release from the organizers prior to the conference denounced "American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the Israeli occupation of Palestine (as) the main reasons for the lack of security, peace and justice in the Middle East." The forum endorsed "resisting occupation by any means (as) a right of all people living under occupation." The forum denounced the "hypocrisy" of G-8 countries for supporting "dictatorial and racist regimes" and "military interventions in the name of spreading democracy." The release argued that democracy and peace had to come from within the societies of the region, and could not be imposed through initiatives from outside.

14. (U) A declaration issued after the conference called for all NGOs to boycott the American and British embassies, severing ties with any NGOs that had relations with Israeli organizations, and establishing an Arab NGO to focus on environmental issues, especially "American/Zionist environmental violations."

15. (U) Local media reported that the alternative forum sent a resolution to the Forum for the Future calling for a number of steps, including action plans and time-lines for reform

from the Arab governments participating in the Forum for the Future; regional, local and municipal elections; judicial reform based on human rights treaties; abolishing martial law in Arab states; and a demand that Forum for the Future participants exert pressure on Israel to respect the rights of the Palestinian people and end the occupation of Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese territory.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The President's visit to Amman, regional events, and the Forum for the Future itself dominated local media during the alternative forum, but the event succeeded in gaining a respectable dose of local and Arab regional media attention.

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